

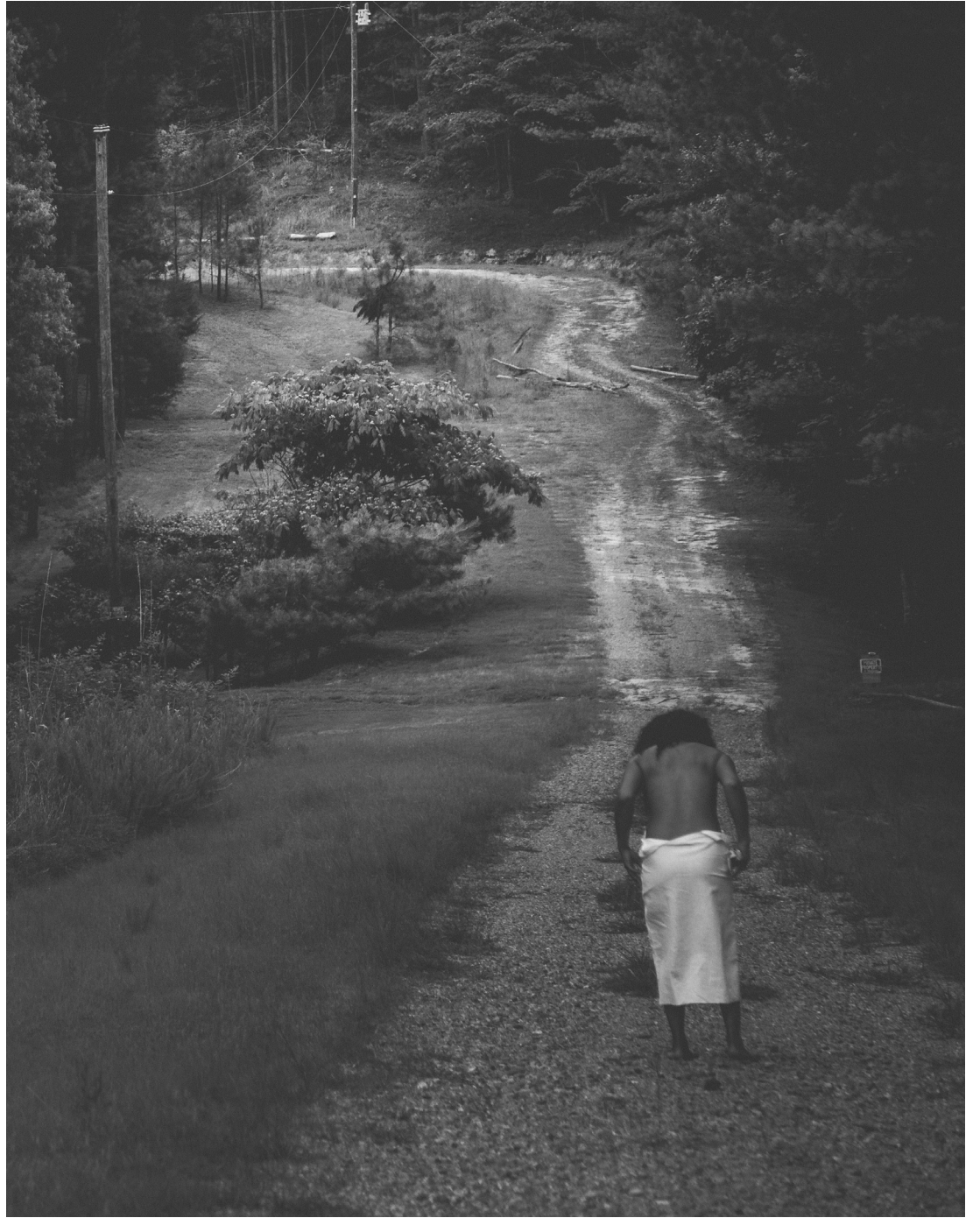
Joel Dias-Porter

SEVENTEEN QUESTIONS

(And a dervish wish)

Beloved, say our souls are lost
in what we seek to salve or solve
in ourselves, plus the wafting magenta
of scented candles or Cassandra Wilson
calmly humming from two corners
You Don't Know What Love Is.
Say one has kissed and paid a cyan cost,
yet still wishes to smell your hair
or cradle you close as what speckles their chest?
Suppose this wish includes more kiss,
not squashed lips, teeth clinking or
a desperate wrestling of tongues,
but melding irises pistoning our pulse?
Say magenta, say cyan, say canary.
Mean these colors of kisses could be key,
kisses perceived as almost melody,
as key notes or uncertain notation
of certain chords,
kisses flitting like sycamore leaves
on a broken branch in a key breeze.
We know we may never taste a lobe
of your ear or peep our peppermint
breath steam across the compact, yet magnifying
mirror of your body. But suppose these hands
were muscled horses roaming the sequoia hills
of those hips, or these fingers
Canary pups under your ruffled blouse.
Say a body breaks all bravado
and stacks that hardened armor at your feet;
then nears you almost naked
as a peeled potato. If said kiss laid
you across a bed's soft greed
and sipped beads of Chablis from your belly
or cupped your breasts like plums-
would a river flow over the cedar banks
of its hands?

Which prayer might peel back clothes
like leaves sheathing an ear of Jersey corn
and finger what fine hair is found there?
Say cedar, say sycamore, say sequoia.
Yet, please don't mean these branches
fear noon's rising heat nor think
this supplicant wouldn't seek to enter
your chapel now boarded up for years.
What if every molecule of ours
was also yours and more entangled
in twists of the plot than vested
in how it unknots, if stars could
parse each beat of our hearts
till shivers start to shine paradox
past the spartan logic of spines?
Yet given the silence that scissors us
our nose may not nest in the knowledge
of your neck or collect scents from deep
in the pockets of your sheets.
But say hand, say hum, say heart.
Not as part of any apt quotation
marked by a curving like lashes,
such as if a tongue whipped twice
could both spark or demark desire,
but simply so that one might somehow
track the syntax of your sighs,
as they silently watch the hands of time
caress the backlit body of a clock.



SOMETIMES IT SNOWS IN APRIL

for LaSon C. White (1961-2007)

April sprouts around us,
is the sky as sullen there? Wasn't
The hour after we talked
cruellest, most raw? In less than a
month, your oncologist says a blizzard of
breeding cells may overwhelm you.
Lilacs still bloom here as there, just
out screened doors. Hints
of all the Prince songs we share.
The purple petals are nearly
dead certain to flurry down,
land and bury your walkway.

April's sibilant drizzle
is a ride cymbal which seems to mock
the insistent rhythm of memories,
cruellest at dusk. What other
month would dream of
breeding, then watering these
lilacs purple as a recent bruise?
Out of the incessant patter
of the rain's thin fingers,
the Alto vibrato of a voice
dead on key, humming "Adore", somehow
lands near these ears.

April winds wane,
is that my phone's ringtone amid
the backscatter of the evening news?
Cruellest is the quiet past the call.
Month after month might sprout,
breeding a peace fragrant as those
lilacs you adored. But right now,
out on the horizon, the purple dirge
of a setting sun is
the last hope I may have of being
dead silent and hearing your voice in the
land of the living.

THE IDEA OF IMPROVISATION IN DUPONT CIRCLE

The whirl of a "Blackbird"
stirs from a battered sax
at the center of the circle.
Its marbled hues ring
like a fountain's waves,
rippling flag-like
in the April wind
blowing a dark Blues,
a rhythm not solely ours,
though perhaps only we
could spy what's sigil
in its rites.
Suppose the white fountain
isn't merely a metaphor,
the soaring "Blackbird"
not simply a symbol.
Could this blue wail
and that widening water
(raving evermore)
be tied by dark chords
if what spouts from
the gray-locked man
was just what he'd heard,
since these chords
were likely voiced by Bird
whose tarnished horn
wasn't spurred
by splashing water
or rippling wind,
but a
sea sharply diminished
within.
If simply a blue sound
of the fountain
stirred or stilled
the green bills in his case
or merely a deep silence
of overhead clouds

floated darkly,
no matter how light,
wouldn't it still be
the yang of dark water
ringing deep?
Why then did he seem
to play something
darker even than the yen
of a black bird's
undulating wings on the wind?
Might this sculpture ringed
with listening pigeons
mean more than just
a spouting place where he
(God with a minor G)
came to create?
What changes are these?
Which Key?
We ask to unravel
its ontological roots,
(though finding mostly
a few chords
we cannot).
A minor Seventh
"singing" said darkness
lies to frame
the admiral light.
As he blows,
what he quills
with this epistle of Paul's
augments and diminishes
our quandary,
so how could
"these broken wings"
be the sole controls
of our sapphire soul?

Meaning listen,
who could see
what the "sunken eyes"
of our enslaved ancestors
might've dreamed
thinking overboard
of some minor C?
O play black Bird,
hint why
Si'l vous plait,
these riddle passages
are the changes you chose,
and by choosing, changed.
Reed why we may have wanted
(as the conductor
of dusk donned
his onyx tuxedo)
to bop our heads
to the traffic's
rumbling motors,
or gyre like civil serpents
to police sirens ringing the circle,
but perhaps heard "learn to fly"
above that alabaster basin
while the Lyric framed the arc
& spume of its spray
or dovetailed in a chord
with a bird-black eye's
charcoal fire or
we deign now to sing-
sky dark,
have you anything
to say?